

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research work aims to study the relationship between Aristotle's rhetoric: Ethos, Logos and Pathos, and tense choice in CEO letters. The details in this chapter are concerned with the research methodology in six sections: research design, sample of the study, research procedure, research instruments, data collection, and data analysis. These are presented respectively as follows.

1. Research Design

Since this study aims to identify the frequency of tenses in each mode of persuasion as defined by Aristotle and to explain the phenomenon, both qualitative method and quantitative method are required. In other words, this research is a qualitative-quantitative research.

This study has three main stages. In the first stage, the researcher categorized each CEO letter's content into *Ethos, Logos and Pathos*. Next, the number of main clauses and subordinate clauses in every tense was identified by counting manually. After that the frequency was calculated into percentages and transformed into bar charts, ready to be analyzed. Finally, the contextual analysis was constructed in order to explain the phenomenon.

The first stage of this study follows the study on Rhetorical Appeals in Thai Annual Reports: An Investigation of the Authority's Language in the Executive Letter during Asia Economic Crisis by Chakorn (2008). The last two stages are mostly adapted from the thesis on Tense Usage in Academic Writing: A Cross-Disciplinary Study by Taylor (2001).

2. Sample of the Study

The sample of this study was the fourteen CEO letters presented at the beginning of annual reports published online in 2009 by some of the world top-ranked multinationals. Four of the fourteen letters were used in the pilot study and the other

ten letters were used in the main research. The letters were from the companies that have different types of products and whose headquarters are in different areas of the world.

The collection of letters for the main analysis consists of ten letters. The number of letters was determined following the suggestion on how language corpora are constructed by Bauer and Gaskell (2000). When the corpus is persuasive text, ten pieces of writing are included in the corpora construction (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000). Since the CEO letters are written using persuasive text, the corpora construction of this study is composed of ten CEO letters.

The researcher chose the CEO letters based on four considerations. First, the fourteen CEO letters are from some of the world's top ranked multinational companies because of their standards and effectiveness. The justification of the text is reflected by its standard and effectiveness in terms of communication as they are top ranked multinationals. Second, to guard against writing styles and practices changing over time, all CEO letters are from annual reports which are published in 2009. Third, because a corpus should include a sufficient range of text, the variety of type and ethnicity of the companies are considered. Lastly, the collection of the corpus has various lengths from a minimum length of 825 words to a maximum length of 4,103 words. The list of the companies' names, their length, type and headquarters are provided in Appendix D.

3. Research Procedure

3.1 Main Research

This study has three main stages. In the first stage, the researcher categorized each CEO letter's content into *Ethos*, *Logos* and *Pathos*. Next, the number of main clauses and subordinate clauses in every tense was identified by manually counting. After that the frequency was calculated into percentages and transformed into the bar charts, ready to be analyzed. In the last stage, the phenomenon was explained proceeding along the contextual analysis. The details of each stage are presented below.

Stage 1

In stage 1 the content of CEO letters was divided into the three persuasive modes by the researcher. The content in the CEO letters was categorized following the categories of the persuasive modes (Appendix G) that were created by the researcher based on the study on Rhetorical Appeals in Thai Annual Reports by Chakorn (2008). The categories were also improved during the pilot study.

Stage 2

Following the research by Taylor (2001), the researcher explored the contents of CEO letters which had already been divided into the three persuasive modes in Stage 1. The researcher looked at the main clauses and subordinate clauses in each mode to identify the frequency of tense occurrence. The researcher examined finite verb phrases (a main verb or a main verb preceded by one or more auxiliaries) in both main clauses and subordinate clauses. The verb group was classified by form. Those clauses in each mode were categorized into twelve tenses, including the future tenses, which are the combination of tense-aspect system. The twelve tenses are shown in the table (Appendix A) taken from Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999). The researcher analyzed the finite verbs in the clauses, relying on the Scope for Tense Counting (Appendix F). This was constructed by the researcher based on the research methodology of Taylor (2001), and checked by an expert who has been teaching grammar to undergraduates for more than twenty years. The researcher counted the finite verbs following this scope (Appendix F). The passive voice in all tenses was also counted. Modals were included as one of the categories for analysis. They cannot be neglected because of their obvious occurrence in CEO letters, especially in *Pathos*. After the tense and aspect had been categorized, the number of each tense in each mode of persuasion was calculated as percentages and transferred into the form of a bar chart, ready for the researcher to describe the occurrence of tense choice in the three modes.

Stage 3

Finally, the researcher analyzed the tense occurrence in each mode, considering the tense functions as described in general English associating them with the three functions based on the theories of rhetoric. Finally, the contextual analysis was constructed with an aim to answer the question of how the conventional use of

tenses in general English support the rhetorical functions. The research procedure including the three stages is illustrated by the following diagram.

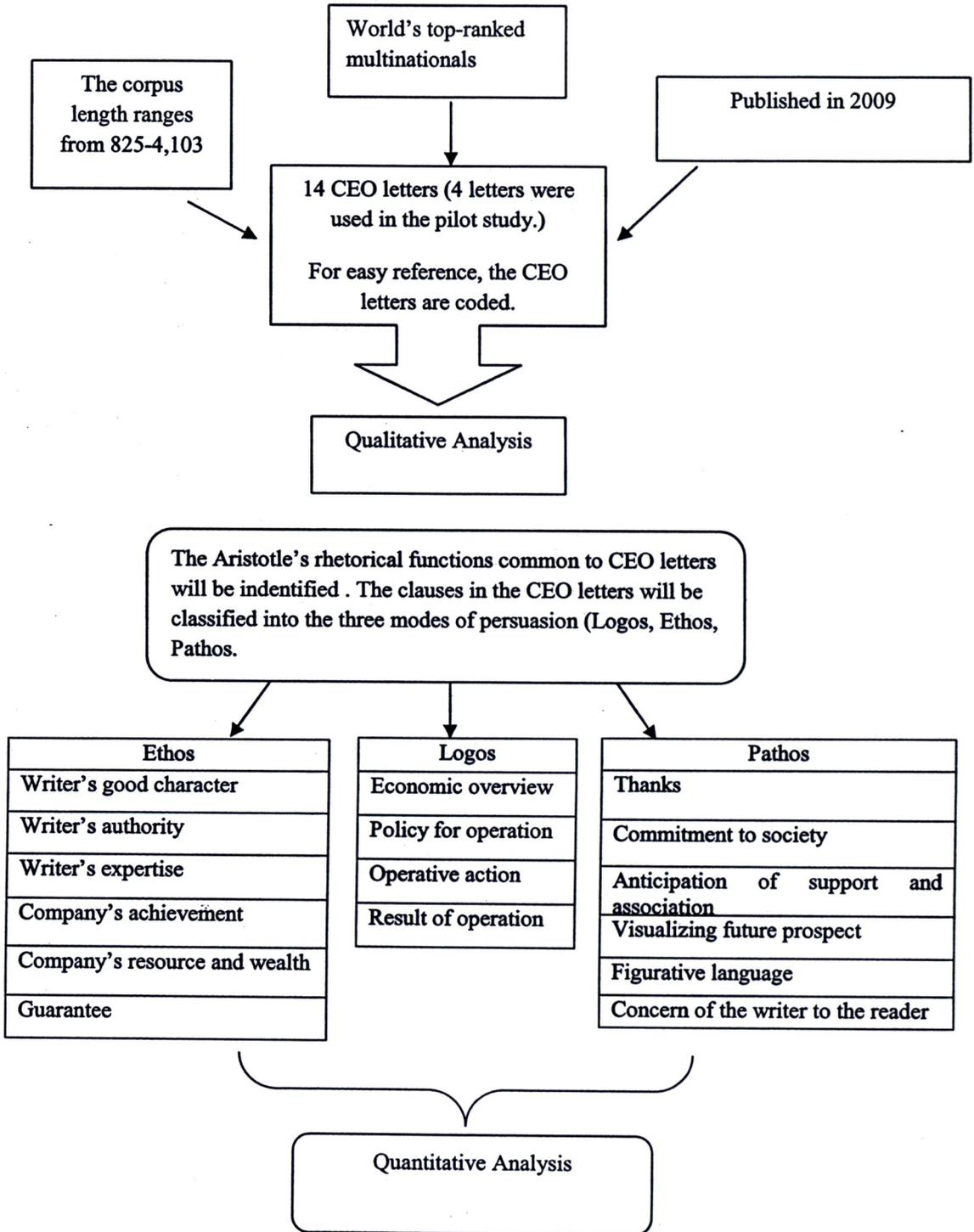


Figure 2 The Research Procedure

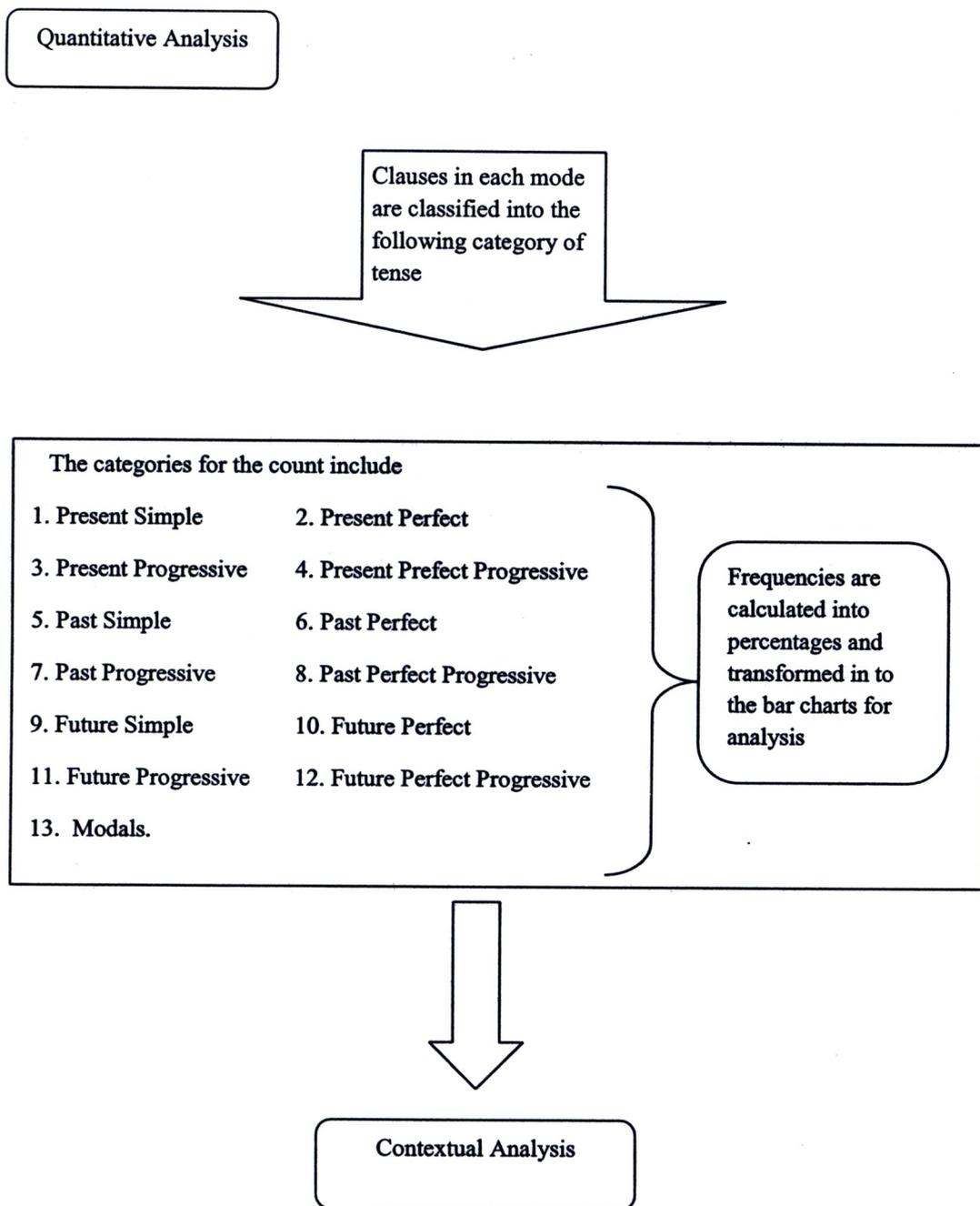


Figure 2 The Research Procedure (Cont.)

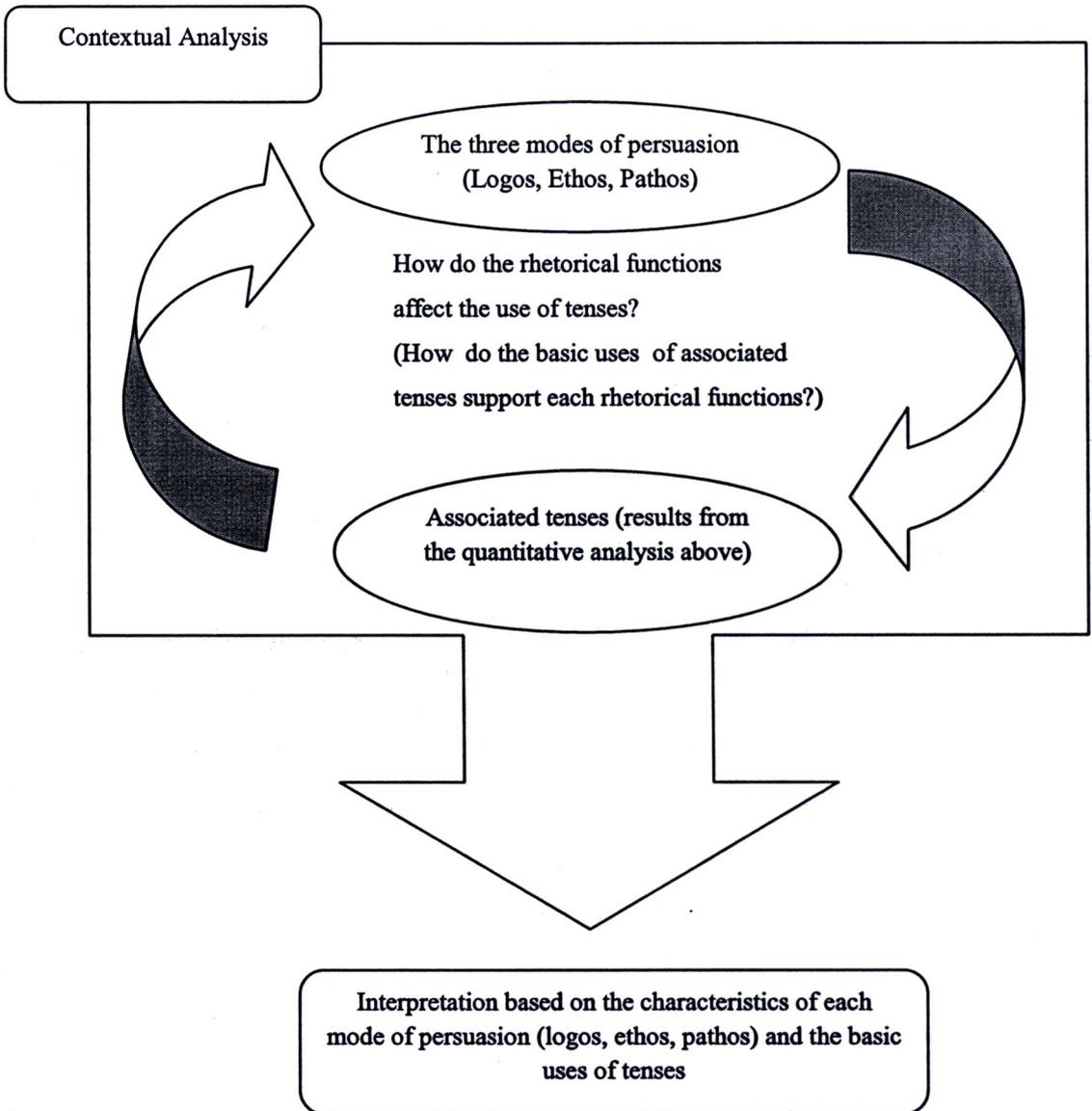


Figure 2 The Research Procedure (Cont.)

This diagram is adapted from a diagram provided in a related study (Taylor, 2001). There are some differences, which I will explain.

In the first part of the qualitative research, the content of this study is persuasive text while Taylor studied academic text. Second, Taylor did not make any value judgment on the presentation of argument, writing style of the individual writers and the effectiveness or correctness of any particular tense choice. However, the value judgment is made in the present study by reference to the effectiveness of the CEO letters as they are from top-ranked companies. Third, the passive voice associated

with the verb forms are not analyzed in the contextual analysis. Also, in the present study it is not questioned whether they are passive or active voice, but finite verbs in both active and passive voice will be treated equally and classified in the tense categories. Fourth, in Taylor's study future tenses were included in the category of modals. However, this researcher separates the future tenses from the categories of modals because they are often found in CEO letters.

Exceptions made in both studies, primarily items other than body content, are worth nothing. In the study by Taylor, captions, tables, maps, abstracts, direct quotations, footnotes, and endnotes are excluded. In the same way, the heading of the letter, subheadings, salutations in the beginning and complimentary close, the signature of the chairman or the executive officer, captions, tables, and photos are not included in the analysis in this study.

In conclusion, following the study by Taylor (2001), to complete this research study there are two main steps to follow. The first research question will be answered by the quantitative research. During this step, the content was divided in to the three modes of persuasion. After that, the second question will be answered by sentence context analysis. During this step, the knowledge of tense basic meanings and uses were applied to the explanation. Before the main analysis, the pilot study was done to assure the reliability of the research tools.

3.2 The Pilot Study

The pilot study was conducted in order to evaluate the reliability of Research Tool 1 (the Categories of Persuasive Modes for Classification).

In the pilot study, the researcher used four CEO letters that have an average length of approximately 1,500 words, which is the maximum length of the CEO letters used in the study by Chakorn, 2008. The four CEO letters are from various types of companies and from different ethnicities. Table D.1 in Appendix D presents the list of the companies from which the CEO letters were taken for the pilot study.

The contents of the body of the four CEO letters were analyzed by the researcher and a native English speaker who has one year of experience in teaching English writing to undergraduates at a University in Thailand. Before the classification, the native speaker was trained by the researcher and studied the

Handbook for Analysis of Persuasion in CEO Letters (in Appendix H) constructed by the researcher based on the result of the study by Chakorn (2008) and Aristotle's theory of rhetoric. The handbook includes the general definition of the persuasive modes with examples, the instruction of the classification, exercises and keys for the exercises. The researcher and the native speaker worked on the four letters independently. After that, the similarities (agreement) and the differences (disagreement) of the classification of the letters were looked at.

It was found at the first stage of the pilot study that the results show 56.75% similarities and 43.26% differences by the two raters. Because of the low percentage of similarities, there was a discussion by the raters on the items on which there was disagreement. After this review, the similarities rose to 83.75 % and the differences decreased to 16.23 %. The remaining differences were considered again by the researcher and the native speaker. In addition, an expert who is familiar with Aristotle's three modes of persuasion because of his experience in political debate as a debater and an adjudicator was consulted. The expert was asked for his opinions on the remaining differences. The discussion during this stage led to more understanding by the researcher regarding the remaining differences.

Also, the expert was consulted on how to improve the categories. Since there were overlaps of meaning between some categories, the consultation led to more comprehensible and distinctive categories. In addition, the correctness of the sub-modes of each main mode was checked based on Aristotle's rhetoric. The sub-modes were made more distinctive based on the suggestions of the expert. The expert gave suggestions and clearer definitions of the three modes. Following these suggestions, the categories for classification were improved and ready for the use in the main analysis.

During the pilot study, not only the effectiveness of the research tool was improved, but the researcher (considered as another research tool) also gained additional knowledge of the three persuasive modes and was better able to classify the content of the letters into the three modes.

After the classification, the finite verbs in the main clauses and subordinate clauses in each mode were looked at and classified into the categories of tenses (Appendix E) following the Scope for Counting Finite Verb Forms (Appendix

F). The total number of tenses used in each mode was calculated into percentages (Appendix L) and transformed into the form of bar chart as presented in Appendix M.

4. Research Instruments

4.1 The Categories of Rhetorical Functions in CEO Letters (Appendix N)

The categories were constructed and developed by the researcher. First, they were constructed based on the examples found in the study by Chakorn (2008) together with the theory of Aristotle's rhetoric. Later, they were evaluated and developed during the pilot study because some content of the CEO letters could not be categorized in the available sub-modes. This reflects the insufficiency of the effectiveness of the categories. Therefore, some sub-modes were deleted, some sub-modes were added in the categories and some sub-modes were combined into one sub-mode. As can be seen in Appendix N, the sub-modes were made more distinctive, more concise and easier to use for classifying the content into each mode. Above all, they were improved to cover all content found in the corpus of the pilot study. After the development, they were used in the first stage of the main research to classify the content of the CEO letters into the three persuasive modes. Later, those classifications were used in the quantitative stage for tense counting.

4.2 The Table for Counting Finite Verb Forms in the Corpus (Appendix E)

This was constructed based on the English tense-aspect system from Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999). The table includes 13 categories; twelve tenses and the category of modals. It was used for counting the finite verbs in the clauses that had already been classified into the three persuasive modes.

5. Data Collection

As mentioned, there are three stages in this research study. Therefore, there are three stages of data collection.

In the first stage, the researcher classified the content of CEO letters into the three persuasive modes by using Research Tool 1: The Categories of Rhetorical Functions in CEO Letters (Appendix N).

In the second stage, the data were collected by manually counting. The researcher counted the finite verb forms in main and subordinate clauses using Research Tool 2: The Table for Counting Tenses (Appendix E). During this stage, the counting based on the Scope for Counting Finite Verb Forms constructed by the researcher (Appendix F).

In the last stage, the examples of each persuasive mode from all CEO letters were gathered by the researcher for the contextual analysis. As can be seen in Chapter 4 in Section 4.2.1 and section 4.2.2, those examples were grouped by verb forms.

6. Data Analysis

To explain the data of this research study, the researcher used the percentage and the mean for the analysis. After the frequencies of the finite verb forms were counted manually. They were calculated into mean and percentages. In the analysis, both the cross-mode comparison and the intra-corpus comparison were made.

To compare the frequencies of verb forms in the corpus, the researcher used a percentage to identify the frequencies of verb forms in the corpus and in each mode. The percentage is used to compare the frequency of finite verb forms. By using the percentage, the dominance of verb forms can be identified. The percentage can be calculated following this formula.

$$P = \text{percentage}$$

$$p = \frac{f}{N} \times 100$$

$$f = \text{frequency}$$

$$N = \text{total number of frequencies}$$

While the percentage was used to see the proportion of each verb form in the corpus and in each persuasive mode, the mean, which is one of the measures of central tendency, is used to determine the average frequency of verb forms. It is the statistic which is used to represent the data. It can be calculated following this formula.

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum x}{n}$$

\bar{X} = the average

ΣX = the total of frequency

n = the number of frequencies

After that, the mean and percentages were transferred into the form of bar charts ready to be analyzed in the contextual analyses by the researcher.

